DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 963 CG 023 306

AUTHOR Satcher, Jamie; Dooley-Dickey, Katherine
TITLE College and the LD Student: Where Does the School Counselor Fit In?
PUB DATE 22 Apr 91
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association for Counseling and Development (Reno, NV, April 21-24, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Preparation; High Schools; *High School Students; *Learning Disabilities; *School Counselors; *Transitional Programs

ABSTRACT

Although the school counselor could play a critical role in the school to college transition for students with learning disabilities, it appears that these students are not being adequately served by the school counseling profession. A school counselor can assist students with college training potential in a number of ways: (1) begin planning well before the completion of high school; (2) be aware of admissions criteria at colleges under consideration, and how the college defines the term "qualified handicapped"; (3) consider the availability of student support services programs; (4) be sure to advise the college of the existence of a learning disability; and (5) consider the availability of accommodations and services to facilitate the adjustment of the student. The school counselor has the knowledge of college programs needed to facilitate the college planning of students with learning disabilities. Furthermore, school counselors' attitudes toward college training as an option for students who have learning disabilities may influence whether or not these students choose to pursue college training. Therefore, it is important that school counselors learn more about learning disabilities and take an active role in assisting these students in preparing for and entering college. (LLL)

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COLLEGE AND THE LD STUDENT: WHERE DOES THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR FIT IN?

by

Jamie Satcher, Ph.D., Asst. Project Coordinator

and

Katherine Dooley-Dickey, Ph.D., Assistant Professor

Department of Counselor Education

Mississippi State University

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Paper presented at the American Association on Counseling and Development annual conference, Reno, Nevada: April 22, 1991

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COLLEGE AND THE LD STUDENT: WHERE DOES THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR FIT IN?

Students who have learning disabilities comprise the largest population of students served in special education programs in the United States (OSERS, 1986). As these students exit high school, it is expected that many might benefit from college training (Bogart, Eidelman, & Kujawa, 1988). The extent to which these students take advantage of the opportunities available to them in college settings, however, may be limited if school counselors do not provide adequate assistance to prepare them for college (Satcher, in press).

Although school counselors could play a critical role in the school to college transition for students with learning disabilities, it appears that these students are not being adequately served by the school counseling profession (Shaw, Byron, Norlander, McGuire, & Anderson, 1987). It has been reported that many school counselor have limited knowledge of what is meant by the term learning disabilities and/or do not view college training as an appropriate option students who have learning disabilities (Greene-Black, 1988; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities). If school counselors increase their involvement with LD students who have the potential for

college training, then these students may be better prepared to effectively plan for, enter, and adapt in the college setting.

Students with learning disabilities present a variety of strengths and limitations. Even though it may not be feasible for all students with learning disabilities to participate in college training, many can be successful if given appropriate support. A number of positive characteristics associated with the successful college training have been identified by Hoy and Gregg (1986) and are as follows: (a) high level of motivation, (b) willingness to experiment with new ideas, (c) ability to comprehend abstract language, (d) emotional maturity, (e) socially inappropriate behaviors, (f) and career goals that are congruent with their abilities.

Limitations associated with learning disabilities that might affect college performance include: (a) short attention span, (b) poor reading ability, (c) limited comprehension of written language, (d) impaired time management skills, (e) distractibility, (f) carelessness, (g) difficulty interpreting social cues, (h) number reversals, and (i) impulsivity. Other limitations include: (a) poor motor coordination, (b) limited writing skills, (c)

poor handwriting, and (d) a limited tolerance for frustration.

The presence of some or many of these limitations does not necessarily preclude the possibility of college training for the student with a learning disability . . . many can be overcome with support and accommodation. However, careful planning is needed to assist students with learning disabilities to apply for colleges which have programs to provide them with the support they may need to overcome their limitations.

Gaining Entry Into College

The school counselor can assist students with college training potential in a number of ways. Recommended items to consider include:

a.) Begin planning well before the completion of high school. If the student is going to apply for college, then college prerequisites must be taken at the secondary level;

b.) Be aware of admissions criteria at colleges under consideration and how the college defines the term "qualified handicapped." Some colleges have flexible admissions policies, such as open admission or provisional admission, whereas others may have stringent grade point or college entrance examination score requirements. Qualified

handicapped may be defined in terms of examination scores or grade point averages. Alterations in admissions criteria may be available for students who identify themselves as having learning disabilities and can provide documentation of their impairments;

c.) Consider the availability of student support services programs, particularly those programs which specifically serve students with learning disabilities. Admissions offices may be able to provide you with contact persons. If not, then this information should be available from student affairs offices;

d.) Be sure and advise the college of the existence of the learning disability. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits colleges and universities from discriminating against persons with disabilities who are otherwise qualified for admission. However, it is illegal for colleges and universities to ask students if they have a disability. Therefore, if students need special consideration, then they must be willing to disclose their disabilities before such consideration will be provided; and,

e.) Consider the availability of accommodations and services to facilitate the adjustment of the student. Look for such

things as (a) courses in study skills, (b) short-term and long-term counseling services, (c) preadmission advisement, (d) access to tutors, readers, and notetakers, (e) access to peer support groups, (f) flexible exam procedures, (g) guidance in structuring the work day, (h) campus orientation programs, (i) diagnostic testing followed by the development of individualized plans to address limitations, and (j) computers for student use (Michael, 1987; Strichart & Mangrum, 1985).

Recommendations for School Counselors

The school counselor has the knowledge of college programs needed to facilitate the college planning of students with learning disabilities. Furthermore, school counselors' attitudes toward college training as an option for students who have learning disabilities may influence whether or not these students choose to pursue college training. Therefore, it is important that school counselors learn more about learning disabilities and take an active role in assisting students with learning disabilities in preparing for and entering college. Specific recommendations include:

a.) Be aware of college training as an appropriate postsecondary option for many students with learning disabilities;

b.) Learn more about what it means to have a learning disability and how the limitations of learning disabilities can be circumvented with accommodation;

c.) Work with these students to help them develop the study skills they will need to succeed in college;

d.) Encourage self-advocacy;

e.) Contact vocational rehabilitation agencies for assistance in evaluation of needs and as a potential source of financial assistance for the student;

f.) Obtain all testing records prior to graduation so that proof of the learning disability can be documented;

g.) Make sure testing is current (within past three years);

h.) Learn about Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973;

i.) Assist in arranging for special testing conditions on college entry examinations;

j.) Contact student support services programs before applications are submitted;

k.) Help the student to arrange to visit colleges before making a definite choice;

l.) Serve as a liaison between the college, the parents, and the student; and,

m.) Provide follow-up once the student has entered college to identify and help resolve any problems that may arise

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